

TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Trends and conditions reports have been a part of the Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT's) planning process for many years. The Department has used these reports to aid policy and planning decision-making, including their use for the state transportation improvement plan (STIP). Historically, FDOT has focused the trends and conditions analysis on those traditional elements of the transportation system that are directly associated with transportation impacts, particularly demand (i.e., population growth, location, transportation modes, economic growth) and supply (i.e., infrastructure, growth in lane miles built, transit service, number and capacity of seaports and airports). More recently, however, federal mandates have directed state departments of transportation (DOTs) to consider the impacts of transportation on other systems in their planning process, including the environment, land use, and environmental justice.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to clarify the relationship between transportation and environmental justice issues and to provide to FDOT with recommendations for addressing environmental justice concerns.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Researchers found that there is little research available concerning the relationship between transportation and the occurrence of environmental justice. Typically, environmental justice issues involve a disproportionately high burden on low-income and minority communities, with negative environmental externalities of activities. In the case of transportation, environmental justice is further complicated by issues regarding the provision of meaningful participation in opportunities for involvement and by equitable access to transportation services.

The research demonstrates that it is important to see environmental justice as an opportunity to make better transportation decisions, by doing the following:

- Making transportation decisions that meet the needs of all people.
- Designing facilities that fit into communities.
- Enhancing the public involvement process and strengthening community-based partnerships.
- Improving the tools for analyzing the impacts of transportation decisions on minority and low-income communities.
- Partnering with other public and private agencies to leverage resources and achieve a common vision for communities.

- Avoiding disproportionately high negative impacts on minority and low-income communities.
- Minimizing unavoidable negative impacts by identifying these impacts early on in the planning process and mitigating the effects.

The research shows that, given the relatively recent emergence of environmental justice as a component of federal policy, many issues remain unresolved. Since transportation is a key component in addressing issues, such as poverty, unemployment, and ensuring equal access to educational and governmental institutions, transportation decision-makers need to take a proactive approach to environmental justice issues. The review of strategies of different federal and state agencies shows that there are common themes, which should be considered for inclusion in an environmental justice strategy:

- Increase in the staff of transportation agencies awareness of environmental justice issues, of the need for meaningful public participation, and of barriers that staff might encounter.
- Evaluate the successes and failures of the agency's prior public involvement activities.
- Identify low-income and minority communities and disproportionate environmental impacts with the help of census data and Geographic Information Systems (GIS).
- Get to know the community.
- Find the best ways to include the community in the planning process to ensure that its needs are met.
- Evaluate the results.

Finally, the report shows that current FDOT initiatives regarding social impact assessment, public outreach, and environmental justice are an indication that FDOT is developing a proactive approach that is much more comprehensive than is required by Executive Order 12898

BENEFITS

As the findings reveal, environmental justice is an important and still emerging area. This project provides information that will be useful to decision-makers so that they can take environmental justice into consideration when making policy decisions.

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